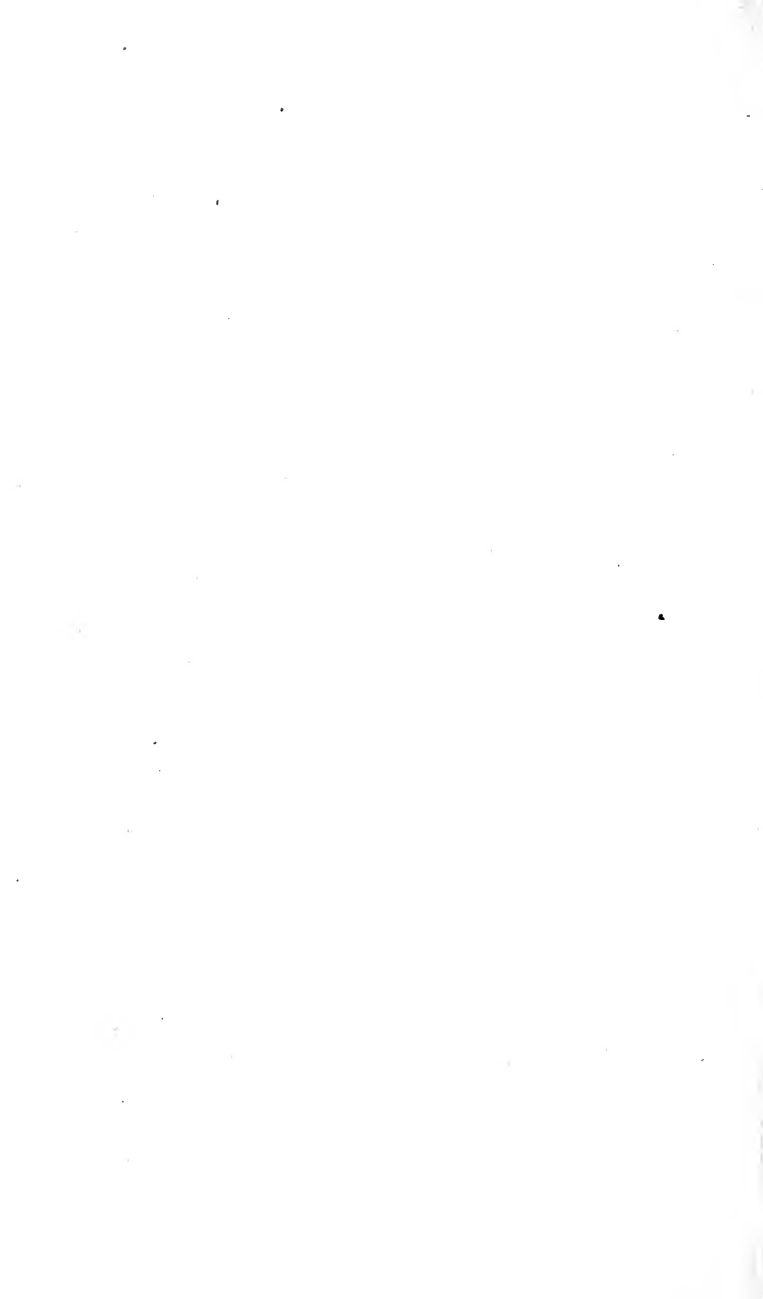


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AN ADVENTURE IN THULE.

BY WILLIAM BLACK.

Author of "Macleod of Dare," "The Four Macnicols," "A Princess of Thule," "That Beautiful Wretch," Etc.

CHAPTER I.

HIGH up on one of the headlands of the island of Lewis, two young lads were idly seated on the grass, sometimes plucking a head of Dutch clover, sometimes turning their eyes to a group of small islands which lay far out at the horizon line, beyond the wide blue spaces of the Atlantic. It was a warm, still, beautiful day. The sea was calm : those low-lying islands out there were faint and pale like clouds.

" Archie," said the elder (speaking in Gaelic, of which the following is a translation), " I saw one of the French smacks go by this morning."

" I saw her, too," replied the younger lad, who was the schoolmaster's son.

There was nothing said for a time. The bees hummed among the clover ; the collie lying near sleepily winked his eyes ; and Colin McCalmont, the taller of the two lads, kept his gaze directed on the pale blue islands out at the horizon. At length he said :

"Archie, my father is a hard-working man; and it is not easy now to make the farms pay, with the rents high and sheep not selling well at the market. My father has not his troubles to seek, as the minister says. And to think that these Frenchmen should be allowed to go and kill a sheep, just as they want it, when they are going by Farriskeir or Rua; that is what angers me."

"And me, too," said Archie Livingstone, "though it is not my father's sheep they kill. It angers me because they are Frenchmen; yes, and thieves besides. But what can you do, Colin?"

They were still regarding the far islands.

"If my father would let me," McCalmont said, "I'd go out and live on Farriskeir until all the French smacks had gone by to Iceland. If they knew any one was on Farriskeir or Rua, that would be enough. They would soon talk about it among themselves, and there would be no more stealing of my father's sheep. Do you think I would be afraid? I would not be afraid. I would build myself a hut, for there is plenty of wood washed up since the big vessel went ashore on Rua."

"Colin," said the other, after awhile, "I have something to tell you. Do you know my horse-pistol?"

"Of course I know it."

"Would it not be a fine thing, now, if you and I were to go out to Farriskeir and hide behind the rocks, and when the Frenchmen were coming near we might have a shot at them?"

"Yes, and maybe kill some one," said the other, scornfully. "That would be a fine thing. It would be a fine thing to be hanged."

"How could they hang you for that?" said the schoolmaster's son. "If a man comes into your house to steal your money, you may shoot at him; and if he comes to your island to steal your sheep, why not the same? Besides he is a Frenchman. The sheriff at Stornoway would not say anything to you for shooting at Frenchman."

"I don't know that. I am not going to try," said the elder lad, with a grim sort of a smile. "But I will tell you now, Archie, what would be a fine thing. Do you think we could slip away to Farriskeir without being seen? There is no one going down to the boat just now; they would not miss it at all. And if any one were asking for us, would they not think we had gone up to the sheilling with bread for Mary and Ailasa and the rest of them?"

"Well, now, if we could slip away out to Farriskeir and lie

behind the rocks, just as you were saying, and if one of the French boats was to come near, where would be the harm in giving a shot in the air? Do you see that now? For they would not dare to land; and when they got up to Reikiavik in Iceland they would tell all the other boats that they had been fired at, and that people lived on Farriskeir and Ruaveg now; and not another Frenchman would ever come near the place again,

"Do you see that now? They would go away up to Reikiavik and they would say, 'There is to be no more stealing a sheep from Farriskeir and making a laugh over it. They have people on Farriskeir now.' And the Frenchmen can understand each other very well, though no one else can make out what they say."

"I will go with you, Colin; we will try it!" said the other, eagerly. "My father will not be back from Stornoway till the Friday night. But about the powder, Colin; I have no powder, and you cannot fire the horse-pistol without powder."

However, there were a great many things to be arranged besides getting powder before this exploit could be ventured upon; and they set about completing these details according to their different temperaments; the younger lad, who was a great reader of books, filled with an eager delight at the romance of the enterprise; the elder animated chiefly by a sober determination that he would do what he could to prevent any more of his father's sheep being stolen. Indeed, it was not until late in the afternoon that Colin McCalmont found time to make his way up Glen-Estera, to Sir Evan Roy's shooting-box there, that he might beg some gunpowder of Dugald McLean, the game-keeper.

He found McLean—who was the sole occupant of the lodge at this time of the year—seated on the bank of the stream that flowed past the house. He was contentedly smoking his pipe and regarding a noble salmon that lay on the grass, while his rod was not far off. Colin had to pull his wits together in addressing the keeper, who had not the best of tempers.

"Eh, but that's a fine fish, Mr. McLean!" said he; the rest of the people called the keeper plain Dugald, so this was a cunning compliment. "That is a fine fish, indeed. I have heard them saying there was not a better salmon-fisher in the Lewis than yourself. They were saying you could throw a fly two-and-forty yards. Some day I will be asking you to teach me how to throw a fly."

"You will be better minding your own business at the

farm." said the keeper, rather gruffly (and also speaking in Gaelic). "What brings you to Glen-Estera?"

"There is not much doing at the farm at this time of the year. I was thinking, Mr. McLean, that perhaps you could spare me a little gunpowder."

"Gunpowder!" the keeper exclaimed, angrily. "To make *pioyes* of and set your father's barn on fire? It is a fool that you are, Colin, and more, to think that I will be giving you any gunpowder!"

The word *pioyes* is applied in Scotland to a small cone made of gunpowder kneaded with water until the powder forms a sort of paste. When the tip of the cone is lit it begins to sputter and hiss like a miniature Vesuvius.

"Indeed, it's you who are wrong then, Mr. McLean, to think I was wanting gunpowder for *pioyes*," said Colin, sturdily. "I am no longer at school; it is not *pioyes* that I am thinking of." And then he cast about for an excuse. "I am sure there is no one who knows better than yourself of the mischief that the *hoodies* make." Hoodies are a species of crow held in much disfavor by the preservers of game in the Highlands.

"Oh," continued the boy, "they are the mischievous birds! The young grouse—the young black game—have no peace for them; but worse than that is the time of the eggs in the springtime. Surely you will know, Mr. McLean, that when a young lad is looking after the sheep, he has many chances of seeing the nests,"

And here it seemed suddenly to strike the keeper that he was neglecting one of the chief elements of his business—which was to keep on friendly terms with the men and lads about the different farms.

"Now that is a good thing I am told about you, Colin, my lad," said he, in quite a different tone; "that you do not take the eggs for foolishness or mischief, and that you do not let the dogs chase the young coveys or the hares; and that you are a sensible lad, and you may have a farm yourself some day from Sir Evan."

"It is not wrong what you have heard about the nests," said Colin, modestly. "And I keep in the dogs, too, though the young dogs are eager after the hares. And I was saying about the hoodies; Archie Livingston has a pistol, and if you were to be giving me a little gunpowder from time to time, I think I could kill a hoodie or two when there was nothing doing but the minding of the sheep."

The keeper rose to his feet.

"There is a job for you, Colin, my lad. Bring the fish into the house, and I will give you some powder."

Very joyously did Colin obey; for, besides his immediate want being supplied, he had now before him the prospect of unlimited stalking expeditions—along the shore and up over the rocks after the detested hoodie-crows. And if he did not tell Dugald McLean for what immediate purpose he wanted some powder, it was because he knew very well that McLean would instantly speak of the matter and compel him to abandon so dangerous an enterprise.

They went into the lodge, and the keeper, who was now quite friendly in his gruff way, gave him some powder in a small tin canister, and even offered him some percussion caps too; but McCalmont explained that the horse-pistol was fired by flint and steel. Then he set out on his way down Glen-Estera again.

When he got back to the coast and near to the headland which had been mentioned, instead of ascending the height, he went down and struck across some broad white sands which in former times were no doubt covered by the sea.

Then he reached a belt of rock facing the Atlantic, and in a small sheltered creek discovered Archie Livingston busy at work overhauling the small sailing-boat that lay at its moorings there. Archie looked up startled, for he had not heard his friend's approach—the sands being soft to the foot.

"They are often saying that Dugald McLean is an uncivil man," Colin McCalmont remarked, as he stepped into the boat that his companion had now shoved alongside the rock, "but he is not that. He has given me a good deal of powder, and I am to have more, too, for shooting the hoodies; and I think you and I, Archie, will have many a good day after the hoodies. They do not fly so quick as the birds the gentlemen go after; but they are a great deal more cunning, and it is not easy to get at them. He is not an uncivil man at all, but a very civil man; and he knows that we do not let the dogs chase the young birds. Did you bring down the bottle of water, Archie?"

"Oh, yes, I brought down the bottle of water, and it's in the locker. And I have gone all over the boat, Colin, and tried the sheets; and, if I were you, it's a new topping-lift I would be having."

But Colin did not seem quite reassured by the fact that his younger companion had inspected the vessel that was to

carry them away from the land in the morning; so now, in the gathering dusk, he set to work himself and had a thorough investigation.

"The topping-lift will do very well," said he, "for it is not in any gale that we are going. With a north wind or a south wind I will go, with an east wind or west wind I will not go. If we were to be beating against a wind either going or coming, would not some one see us sooner or later? And you know very well, Archie, that it is not a sure thing that we may see any French smack come near, though now is the time of their passing; and that would be a fine thing to have all the people making a joke of us, and saying:

"Look at the boys that went out to frighten the Frenchmen and came running back without seeing any."

"I would not like that, neither would you; but it is I that would have to do the quarrelling, if there was any quarrelling. But now, if there is a nice steady wind from either north or south in the morning, then we will run away out in a short time and get the boat hidden in a creek at Farriskeir; and the topping-lift will do very well," and with that he gave another haul at it, swinging the end of the boom up into the air.

Now when everything had been made fast and secure for their voyage on the morrow—the main-sail having been lowered and stowed—Archie was called upon to produce the weapon which was to give a wholesome warning to the French fishermen to avoid the shores of Farriskeir and its adjacent islands.

It was a large cavalry pistol, somewhat dilapidated, but showing traces of ancient adornment. Archie had freshly oiled and polished it, he had put a newly-clipped flint in the hammer, and when his companion struck the flint on the empty pan (the sparks shone with a sudden brilliancy in the gathering dusk) the lock worked easily.

"I would try a little powder in it, Colin," suggested the younger lad.

"The night is so still they would hear it up at Dunvorgan," said the elder lad, who was the more prudent of the two.

"It will be giving no sound at all, Colin, if there is no wadding in the barrel. You will put a little powder in the barrel and a little powder in the pan, and then you will see if the little hole is all clear."

Well, there could be no objection to that, and so Colin produced his precious canister, and very grudgingly meas-

ured out a few grains for the experiment. The result was quite satisfactory. There was the sharp click of the descending flint, and almost at the same moment a flash of red flame in the darkness.

So the pistol was carefully wrapped up in the old stocking that was its customary case, and deposited in the locker along with the bottle of water and the oatmeal cakes which were their store for the forthcoming voyage.

Then the two lads got ashore again, and in the dusk made their way across the white sands and away up toward Dunvorgan farm. For a time they were silent.

"I have been thinking, Archie," said the elder of the two at last, "that it would not be a nice thing if the crew of the smack were to land and hunt us out. What would we do then?"

The other made no reply.

"There would be five or six of them, Archie, and if they were to land they would catch us, even if we were to go into the cave at the point opposite Rua. And if they were to catch us, Archie, it is not you and I that would be able to fight six of them."

And again, "I was thinking, Archie, that it would be better if I was to go by myself. It is not right that you should go into a risk for the sake of my father's sheep; that is foolishness; I can manage the boat very well by myself."

"Then you can give me back my pistol," said the other, who was evidently deeply hurt. "If you think I am afraid, you can give me back my pistol."

"I did not say you were afraid. I said there was a reason for my going, and there was no reason for your going. If there was to be a fight, what would you do?"

"What would you? Do you think I am more afraid of the French fishermen than you? Very well, then, I will take back my pistol."

Colin very soon perceived that his companion was bent on sharing this enterprise, whatever peril it might involve, and at last a compromise was affected; Archie Livingston agreeing that, in the event of the French fishermen venturing to land to discover who had fired at them, he should be the first to make for the little natural cave in the rocks that both the lads knew well, and that Colin should be allowed to look about a little and see what was likely to happen before seeking the same place of refuge.

It may be presumed that neither of the lads slept very

much that night ; for, besides the excitement of the enterprise, they had agreed to meet down at the little creek not later than half-past four in the morning. And, as each went stealthily his own way to the place of rendezvous, a fair, still dawn was breaking over land and sea, and everything gave promise of a beautiful day. Moreover, the slight cool breeze of the morning was blowing up from the south ; it was a fair wind to carry them out to the islands, where they were to lie in wait for the Frenchmen.

CHAPTER II.

THE setting forth of the two lads on their voyage to the far islands on the horizon was managed with all due secrecy and despatch, for both of them were well aware that, if the people at the farm got to know on what mission they were bent, they would immediately be stopped. But once away from the shore they grew more confident ; and they could call to each other freely—Archie Livingston having been sent to the bow as a sort of lookout.

“ Archie,” called out the elder lad, who was at the stern, with the sheet of the mainsail in his hand and his elbow on the tiller, “ they cannot stop us now.”

“ That they cannot, Colin.”

“ And do you think that Ailasa and Mary and the rest of them up at the sheilling will be awake and out yet ? ”

“ No doubt they will be awake and out,” said the younger lad—both of them speaking in Gaelic.

“ For, if any one is to see us they will be the first to see us, from the hillside. Yes, and maybe they are saying now, ‘ There is the boat going out ; and who can be in the boat ? and what does any one want to go to Farriskeir for ? ’ Well, they will not be guessing that easily.”

“ Colin,” said the younger lad, “ it will be a hard thing if we have taken all this trouble and find none of the French fishermen coming near. I suppose you have heard that the French ships were always running away when they were told that Nelson was coming after them : and that it was not easy for him to fight them because he could not tell where they were ? Well, they are not running away from us ; but it will be just as bad if we do not find any of the smacks coming near

Farriskeir or Ruaveg. And then what will you say when you go back?"

"You are afraid of being laughed at," said the elder lad, "that is what I am thinking. You are afraid they will say, 'There are the boys who went out to frighten the Frenchmen and could not find them.' But answer me this, Archie; if we do not tell them why we went out, how will they know?"

"If they have seen us from the sheilling, Ailasa, or Red-haired Maggie, or one of them will be asking," said the other, diffidently.

"Yes, they will be asking; it is the way of girls. But that is no need why we should tell. And this is what I am thinking of, Archie: if there is not any French smack coming near the islands, well, we will go back to the wreck, and there are many things that we can pick up; and why should we not bring away a boatful of the spars and planks that my father drew above the water-mark at Rua?"

"It is very useful these things are at the farm; and the last time we were out, we had not an inch of spare room in the boat when we were coming back, such a load we had; and if the girls at the sheilling hear that we have brought back a cargo of wood from Ruaveg, what then? Where will be their questions then?"

They were now well away from the land; and so steady was this light breeze from the south that the navigation of the boat involved no great care. The helmsman could with sufficient security turn from time to time to regard the familiar landmarks they were leaving behind—the wide white sands, the masses of rock, and far beyond and above these the giant peaks of Mealasabhal and Suainabhal, all faintly colored by the morning sun.

Or again, he would stand up in the boat to get a better look at the islands ahead; and these, as the distance gradually grew less, were beginning to show distinctive features along their shores.

But of any French smack or other vessel they could find no sign whatever. As far as their eyes could reach, this wide circle of the blue Atlantic seemed to belong to themselves. Once, indeed, they caught sight of the topsails of a brigantine, the rest of the vessel being below the horizon; but apparently she was beating down against the southerly breeze, and, having put about, was soon lost to view.

"It will be no harm if we get out to the islands without any one seeing us," said Colin McCalmont. "It will be a

great deal better. For if one of the smacks was to see us going out, and if another smack was to take the word to Reikiavik that there were people now on Farriskeir, and that they had guns, then there would be a great laughing, and some of them would be for saying, 'Why, are you frightened? It is no one but two boys who are on Farriskeir; for we saw them going out. And are you frightened because you heard the boys shooting at the curlews?'

"That is true what you say, Colin; and anyway we will take back a load of wood with us," said the younger lad, who was very clearly anxious that the girls at the sheilling should have no cause to jeer at them.

And now the islands grew more and more distinct; and, as they drew nearer and nearer, the lads could see and hear that their appearance was causing a vast commotion among the innumerable wild-fowl that filled the air with their cries. The curlews uttered their warning whistle as they wheeled high in the air; the sea-pyots whirled along close to the water; the terns came flying overhead, screaming angrily as they dipped and rose again. And what was that great shapeless black thing, that lay on a spur of rock not nearly as large as itself?

"Colin," the younger lad cried, "look at that now! The wreck is not all gone away yet; and they were saying she would go to pieces before two days or three days were over, and not an inch would be left of her."

"There is not more than a third of her left now," Colin McCalmont said; "and it is nothing but a lump of old iron she is. But we will go round the point of Rua and look at her. Slack the lee jib-sheet a bit, Archie; maybe we will get something out of her that may be of use at the farm."

"I would not go too near, Colin," said the younger of the two, "for she might tumble over on us."

"Tumble over on us!" said the other, with a laugh of derision. "When she has stood out two gales!"

But indeed when they rounded the point of one of the small islands and drew nearer to this great broken mass of iron perched high on a narrow ledge of rock, it was a gruesome sight, and they approached with caution. For one thing, they had lowered their mainsail, and had taken to the oars, backing the stern of the boat towards the wreck (which towered high above them), so that they could see how near they could go in safety.

Huge as this rent and shattered fragment of a vessel seemed, the steamer had been of no great size; but when, on a pitch-

dark night, and the captain having made some mistake about the lights along the coast, her stem was suddenly jammed on to this rock, her impetus was great enough to lift her up the shelving ledge, so that at low-water her keel forward was high and dry. But her back was broken ; and the first heavy sea that came rolling in from the west knocked her boilers out and tore down her stern into deep water, leaving nothing standing but the bow, which now presented an extraordinary appearance.

Outside the hull was black ; but inside everything was red with rust ; and as the two lads backed their boat until this riven mass of confusion seemed almost over their heads, there was something awful in the evidence everywhere around of the tremendous force of the sea.

The twisted girders, the thick iron plates, torn from their rivets and bent about as if they had been made of pasteboard, the iron cables snapped as if they had been so many watch-chains—all this spoke of a frightful combat ; and seemed so strange, now, with this placid blue sea all around, and all around, too, a silence broken only by the distant calling of the curlews.

The two lads regarded this picture of ruin and desolation without uttering a word, apparently overawed by it ; but at last Colin McCalmot said,

" Archie, do you not think I could climb up inside of her ? there might be something that one could find."

" Indeed you will get nothing but cut fingers with the broken iron," said Archie Livingston, with decision. " Did they not take everything out of her ? And what would you say now if one of the plates of iron were to fall on you ? "

The elder lad was still looking up, however, at the shattered remnant of the vessel.

" Archie, back her a bit more ; and I will see if I can get up to the lower deck there."

The younger boy did as he was bid, though rather reluctantly ; and it was with a trifle of dismay that he beheld his companion clamber on to the wreck and begin to work his way up among the rusty iron. Then he saw him reach what remained of the lower deck, where there was still some wood-work ; and after searching about for a while he picked up something.

" Look here, Archie," he called out (his voice sounding hollow in the shell of the wreck). I have found a pair of deer's

horns. Take care, now, and I will throw them down to you."

The next moment the horns fell on the lowered mainsail and rebounded into the bottom of the boat.

"What is the use of them?" the younger lad cried—for he did not like the look of his companion clambering about up there. "If you want deer's horns, you will find them along the shore. It was part of her cargo. What is the use of deer's horns?"

However, something now happened that brought back Colin McCalmont speedily enough into the boat, without any further remonstrance. In crossing over to the other side of this lower deck he found a place where he could look out to sea; and of course at this height his view was far more extensive than that obtainable from the little sailing-boat below.

"I can see a big steamer away out there," he called, looking toward the west. "Where can she be going now? There is no steamer of that size will be going to Iceland."

The next minute, as he turned to the southern horizon, something caught his eye which provoked no exclamation, but which caused him to hurry down from the wreck in half the time it had taken him to climb up.

"Archie," said he, in an excited whisper—although the boat he had seen was still miles off—"do you know this, There is a French smack coming up. I am sure of it—I know it—there is no other vessel that would be coming so near the land.

"Be quick, now, Archie; we will row round to Farriskeir; I will not put the sail on her at all; we will row through the channel between Farriskeir and Rua, and maybe we will have her in the little harbor before they can see us. Do you understand that now?"

Archie Livingston took his oar quickly enough; though, to tell the truth he was somewhat alarmed. The adventure had been so far pleasant and romantic in its way; but it assumed a new aspect when he definitely knew that a crew of French fishermen were coming along, and probable danger at hand. He did not speak at all; and both knew equally well the course they had to make. They rowed away from the wreck, then along a narrow and tortuous channel between two islands; then they beheld before them the open sea again.

CHAPTER III.

"Do you see her?" said Colin McCalmont, in the same low voice, as if the Frenchmen could hear at that distance.

"Yes," was the reply, as the younger lad descried the small dot of a vessel away down there in the south.

"Do you not think that is one of the smacks?"

"That is what I think." Then he added: "Colin, if they go by peaceably, and do not try to kill one of your father's sheep, we need not do anything? They will not know we are here."

"What did I come out for?" said the other scornfully. "What did I come out for but to let every one of them know we are here? I want it talked about at Reikiavik; that is what I am thinking of. I do not wish to have any more of my father's sheep killed. I wish them to take the story to Reikiavik that there are people on Farriskeir now, and that if any one goes near to Farriskeir to have a shot at the sheep—well, the shooting may not be all on one side. It is not for nothing that I have come out to Farriskeir."

They rowed round the southern end of the island, and then to the eastern side made their way into a small, naturally formed harbor which was protected by a low ridge of rock. Over this rock the mast of the boat could be seen easily enough; and that was what Colin McCalmont wanted. Even if the French fishermen did not approach the island, they would at least see the mast of the boat (provided they came that side), and would so gather that Farriskeir was not always to be a happy hunting-ground for them.

They got the anchor ashore, and made the boat fast; then they had their own movements to consider.

"Archie," said the elder, "if you are afraid, go away to the cave at the end of the island; they will never think of searching that."

"Whether I am afraid or not is no great matter," said the other; "it is where you are that I am going to be."

"Oh, very well, then; we will now set about loading the pistol."

The pistol they had brought ashore with them; likewise the canister of powder, some wads, and a small paper bag full of shot.

"Are you going to put shot into it, Colin?" said the younger

boy, somewhat timidly, when his companion had filled in the powder and rammed the wad home.

"Well, now, it is much more than I that you will know about this pistol, Archie; but I was thinking if there were some shot put into it, it would make the greater noise, and be more like a gun. What do you say to that now?"

"But you will not fire at them?"

Colin McCalmont laughed derisively—but not very loudly.

"And that is a very fine thing!" said he. "Who was it that wanted at the very beginning to have a shot at the Frenchmen? Who was it that was not afraid of the sheriff at Stornoway?"

"But it would be a dreadful thing to kill a man, Colin."

"Now that is the truth you are speaking, like the old man of Ross. The old man of Ross never said anything truer than that. And it is not that I want to be taken before the sheriff at Stornoway. No; I am putting in shot to make a fine good noise; but afterwards I may also put in shot; do you see that now? *This* time it is to make a noise, and give them a story to carry to Reikiavik; *that* time it will be if they want to land and chase us. And then every one for himself; that was what the weasel said when he went home."

"Colin," said the younger lad, timidly, "when we were coming near the island I saw two wild swans fly away. It is not a good sign to see the wild swans fly away from the island."

"Your head is full of nonsense," said the other scornfully.

"They say the wild swans are princesses," continued Archie Livingston, not heeding the taunt, "that were changed by magic. And it is not a good thing to see them fly away when you come near the land."

"It is many and many a wild swan I have seen—yes, thirty of them together, washing themselves and flapping their wings in Loch an-Innis; but never yet one that would wait till you could put salt on its tail. Archie, my lad, your head is full of nonsense. But if you are afraid of wild swans, or princesses, or anything else, then there is the cave for you; and you can leave me to deal with the frog-eaters. This is what I am afraid of: that they may not come near enough—it is not the wild swans that I am afraid of."

"And if I am afraid, I am not going to run away," said

his companion. "That is the one thing I am not going to do. Where you are, Colin, it is there I am going to be."

"Very well, then, we will go and get a good hiding-place behind the rocks; and you will be very quiet, Archie, so that, if they think about landing to steal a sheep, we will see it very plainly; and then, after the shot, you will do as I do—but not a word all the time."

It was not without a great deal of difficulty and cautious experimenting that Colin McCalmont found a suitable hiding-place for himself and his companion. But at last he discovered an abrupt little hollow behind a ledge of rock, where, himself unseen, he could peep over and watch the approach of the vessel that was now drawing nearer and nearer; while, in the event of the fishermen landing and pursuing them, they could from this point slip unperceived up to the northern end of the island, where there was a cave not likely to be discovered.

The smaller lad lay prone on the rock, motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. His companion from time to time cautiously peered over the edge; and now there was no doubt at all that the vessel was one of the French fishing-smacks bound for Iceland.

McCalmont took the precaution of putting a few grains of fresh powder in the pan of the pistol; then they waited—in a profound silence broken only by the monotonous plashing of the sea along the rocks and the shingle.

Just in front of his head, as he lay on the sloping ledge of rock, McCalmont had placed a few tufts of withered heather, through which he could easily see what was going on. And when the French vessel came along, and when he saw them deliberately put her head up to the wind, the lower a boat, and put two men in the boat, who calmly began to row to the island, his face grew red with anger. He dared not even whisper to his companion, who was lying mute and motionless beside him (and very much afraid, too, though he would not have admitted it), and he was saying to himself:

"If this now is not the most impudent thing! Oh, yes! you will come and help yourself to a sheep—a sheep belonging to a poor man who has to work hard enough for his living; and you will have a good dinner on board; and a good laugh when you go to Iceland. It would take little now to make me fire at you and your boat—you French thieves!"

But whether or no it was the fear of the sheriff at Stornoway, wiser counsels prevailed. When he had allowed the boat and the two men to come within thirty or forty yards of the island he took up the big horse-pistol and locked the hammer. Then, holding it tight (for fear of the recoil) at arm's-length from him, he pointed the pistol along the gully behind him, and pulled the trigger; and the next second there was a sudden crash of noise in the silence, and a puff of splintered rock where the shot had struck.

Archie Livingston looked terrified; but McCalmont, having serious work on hand, turned to his hiding-place again, and peeped through the tufts of heather to see what effect this shot might have had.

The men in the boat were very obviously surprised. They had stopped rowing. One of them, indeed, was now standing up, closely scanning the shore; and McCalmont kept himself closely concealed, for he knew that the smoke from the gunpowder would give them some more or less vague indication of his whereabouts.

What would they do? Would they go back to the fishing-smack, merely with the impression that now there were people living on the island? Or would they consider that they had been fired at, and be tempted to make reprisals?

He could see that they were excitedly talking to each other; and one of them pointed to the little creek in which McCalmont's sailing-boat lay; then they put their oars into the water again, and continued rowing for the shore.

"They are going to land, Archie!" said McCalmont, in a quick whisper. "Come along—sharp! We will make for the cave; and there will be time to load the pistol there. Quick! quick, now! and keep low down."

But every nook and gully of the island was well known to both of them; and they easily made their way to the north end of the island without showing themselves on any of the little grassy plateaus or of the higher rocks. Fortunately, too, for them, their appearance earlier in the day had frightened the half-wild sheep over to the western side of the island, so that there was no scurrying of the startled animals to show their track.

They reached the coast line again; made their way along some rocks; and then, slipping down cautiously, entered a small cave that just allowed them to stand upright. The floor was of sand and shells washed in by the high tides; a few tufts of sea-asplenium showed their dark-green fronds in the

shelves and crannies : otherwise the cave was pretty much of a bare black hole, with a curious damp odor of sea-weed in it.

"Now, Archie, the powder—quick!"—for the younger lad had charge of the ammunition.

It cannot be denied that Archie's fingers were trembling somewhat, as he produced the tin canister ; but his companion did not notice that—he was too anxious to have the pistol loaded. And when that was completed he seemed to breathe more freely.

"Now do you see this, Archie," said he cheerfully, "that we have the best of the position? For if they come after us and find out the cave, we are in the dark, and they cannot make us out, but they are in the light, and we will see everything they mean to do. And there are only two of them ; and what I am determined on is this—if they try to do any harm to us, I will put a shot on to them, whether there is a sheriff in Stornoway or no.

"It is no use speaking to them, for they do not understand any language but their own. And if they point a gun at you or me, it is I that will be firing first, or you may be calling me a splay-footed* fellow. But as for you, Archie, if they find out the cave, you will go right to the back of the cave, and you will lie down, with your face to the ground, and they will not see you at all. For it is better to be safe without fighting than to be safe after fighting, as the old man of Ross said."

They waited and waited, and there was not a sound outside.

"I wonder now," the elder lad said at length, "whether they thought I was firing the shot at them? Perhaps they did not come ashore at all. That will be much better ; if they have gone back to the others, and told them that the time is past now for having a sheep off Farriskeir."

"I am sure I hope they have gone away" Colin," said the younger of the boys, who had not spoken since they entered the cave.

He had been listening for sounds without ; not quite certain whether, in the event of pursuit, he should take his companion's advice and hide, or whether he ought not to lend what help he could.

Suddenly something occurred that made both the lads start. They found two eyes glaring into the cave—two large, soft,

**Guagaire* was the word he used, but, besides meaning "splay-footed," it is also used to denote one who is idle or giddy or frivolous.

staring eyes, that belonged to a bushy, flat-shaped head; and then the next moment, before they had time to recover from their fright, the strange creature had turned and made off as quickly as its webbed feet and long tail would allow.

"I never saw an otter on the land before," said Colin McCalmont, who was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"He must have come up through the sea-weed there. If it was not for the Frenchmen, maybe I could catch him yet; for they go so very slow on the land."

"Colin do not go out of the cave," the other entreated. "As for an otter, what is an otter? You can trap one at Camus Head, if you want one. And as for that one, he is down through the sea-weed and into the sea long ago. He will be as far away as Ruaveg by this time."

Nevertheless, with the natural curiosity of a young lad, Colin must needs go to the mouth of the cave, and peer cautiously around. There was no sign of any otter; and there was neither sign nor sound of the French fishermen. But the next second something else caught his eye.

"Archie, come here!" he called out. "Come here now! See, the smack is away to the north. I know that is the same one from the red patch on her mainsail. They have gone away now, Archie."

"And a good thing, too," said the younger lad, coming out to the light and the warmer air. "Yes, that is the smack, Colin I believe. And now they will take the story to Reik-iavik."

"Yes," said his companion, with something of triumph in his face and tone. "That is true. And there will be no more stealing of the sheep now. And what we have to do now is to put some of the timber and the spars into the boat, and get away back to the mainland."

"And you will not be afraid of the questions any more, Archie, if the girls at the sheilling will be asking you why you went to Farriskeir. For did we not prevent the Frenchmen landing? And we saved one, or maybe more, of my father's sheep; and the warning to the frog-eaters will be a good thing besides. There is only one thing now that I am sorry for."

"And what is that, Colin?"

"That I did not have a shot at the otter."

"That I am not sorry for," said his friend (who had regained all his modest confidence and cheerfulness); "it

was a more important thing than an otter that we came for; and never before did I hear my pistol make such a noise."

"I thought my arm was off," said Colin, with a laugh.

They had by this time got back to the gully behind the ledge of rock which they had chosen for their hiding-place, and some distance beyond that again was the creek where they had moored their sailing-boat. All at once McCalmont paused with a strange look on his face.

"Archie, where is the boat?" said he.

The younger lad glanced at him awe-stricken. It was more from the look of Colin's face than from anything else that he guessed something was wrong.

"Archie, they've stolen the boat—they've taken away the boat!" said the elder lad, gazing at the empty creek.

"That is not possible, Colin," said the other (but with a sudden sinking of the heart). "They dare not do that. It would be seen. They had no boat towing astern. Maybe they have hid it, Colin, for a joke."

Without answering, Colin ran up to the top of one of the higher plateaus, and eagerly scanned every little indentation of the coast-line. But no mast was visible; and the mast of the boat was higher than any of these rocks. Then his quick eye noticed something floating on the water some forty or fifty yards out, and then something else—a basket that he recognized; and then he knew what had happened.

CHAPTER IV.

BUT before going down to his companion he pulled himself together. He knew that Archie Livingston was easily frightened; and this that had happened was enough to frighten an older lad than he. McCalmont descended from the plateau slowly, considering what he should say, and doing his best to assume an indifferent demeanor.

"Archie," said he, "there is no doubt about what the Frenchmen have done. They have taken out the boat and sunk her. Yonder are things belonging to her, floating on the water; but not the oars. They have stolen the oars."

Almost mechanically the younger lad's eyes were turned to the space of water indicated by his companion; and then said, aghast:

"Colin, we shall die of hunger."

Colin had prepared for this.

"Die of hunger!" he exclaimed. "Now you are talking like some poor creature who has never been away from a town. You are talking like the tailor who came to Bernera last year, and he did not know that cattle could swim."

"How could we swim to the mainland?" said the younger lad, who seemed ready to cry. "It is twelve miles and more."

"I did not mean that at all. I say you are talking foolishness when you speak of dying of starvation; and that you ought to know better, being a Highland lad, and not a tailor from Glasgow."

Indeed, this raising of his companion's spirits was giving McCalmont himself plenty of spirits.

"Now, look here, Archie. The loss of the boat, that is bad; my father can ill afford to lose the boat; and that is a hard thing. But there is no more than that. They will soon find out that we are here, and they will send over for us; and, until they send over for us, do you not think we will find enough and plenty to eat? Is there no *dulse* along the shore? Are there no *eachans** in the sand?"

"One would think, to hear you talk, that you were the high Lord Provost of London, who eats all the day long and half-way through the night, and only stops to sleep for an hour or two. Tell me this, now: if *eachans* and *dulse* will not do, if it is to be like the Lord Provost you are wishing, could I not shoot a sheep? Just think of that; and do not talk any more about starvation."

"But how will they know that we are here, Colin?" said the younger lad, looking far away over to the blue line, with one or two higher peaks, that represented the mainland.

"I will tell you a story, Archie. It was a fishing-boat at St. Kilda, and she went away in the morning, with five men in her, and there was a head storm during the day, and the boat was smashed on a small island—perhaps it was Eilean Mòr, and perhaps it was Gealtaire Mòr; that is no matter; but the five men saved themselves.

* The *eachan* is a shell-fish resembling the cockle, but a trifle smaller, and with a smooth shell. It is similar to, if it is not identical with, the American clam; and it is odd that, while it is the common shell-fish of the sandy bays in the western Highlands, it is quite unknown, as far as I am aware, in the south of Great Britain.

"Very, well, then ; what did they do ? They gathered bits of stick, and dried heather, and the like, and they made them into five fires ; and when the night came they lit the five fires, and their wives and the people at St. Kilda saw the fires, and they knew that all the men were saved.

"Now, does that story tell you anything, or does it not tell you anything ?"

"We will light a fire to-night, Colin?" said the younger lad, eagerly.

"We will not. What would be the use of that ? They will not be looking out for us at all : for they will think that we have gone away up to the sheilling with bread for the girls. But to-morrow the girls will be sending down ; and then they will ask where we are ; and then there will be a search everywhere ; and then in the evening we will have a great heap of wood together and the dried heather, too ; and they will see the fire well enough."

"Will we have to stay on the island to-night, Colin?" said Archie, looking apprehensively around—for his mind was stocked with the mysterious legendary tales and fancies of these northern solitudes.

"I do not say that, Archie," replied his companion, grimly. "If you can swim to the mainland, there will be no need to pass the night on Farriskeir. But if you can it is not I that can. It is a good swim from Farriskeir to the White Sands of Uig."

And then he looked out at the one or two objects floating in the water which told him where the Frenchmen had sunk the boat.

"Yes," said he, "and they have sunk our oatcake, too, and our bottle of water, I know where there are two springs, but sheep tread over them, and if we clean them out it will be a long time before they settle. So we will do that first, Archie. You will clean out the springs, and I will go to the wreckage that my father and the rest of them collected, and I will get two or three boards and put over the springs so that the sheep may not trample over them."

The first spring they went to looked unpromising enough ; it was more like a path of green mire in a hollow of one of the grassy plateaus. But they sought out its source, and the younger lad set to work to remove the muddy herbage, while his companion went away for two or three planks.

Indeed, they had plenty of work cut out for themselves during the day. They hunted for dulse. They each got a piece

of iron from off the wreckage and dug in the soft sand for eachans. And then they gathered bracken for their bedding: whereupon arose the question as to where they should pass the night.

"The driest place would be the cave," said Colin, "and you will see by the withered seaweed on the shore that it is many a day since the sea washed any sand into the cave. There is no danger of that at all. It is with a spring-tide and a heavy gale from the west that you might have water in the cave."

"Colin," said the other, doubtfully, "I have heard about wild-cats being about the caves."

"There is not a wild-cat on the island," said the other, impatiently. "Do you think that wild-cats can swim from the mainland? It is all very well for an otter to swim from the mainland, and if an otter comes into the cave, who will be the more frightened? Is it not you or I, but the otter, that will get a fright if he comes in the night-time and finds us there asleep. And this is what I am thinking of now, Archie; will we not take some planks into the cave, and put them on the sand, and put the bracken on them? and that will make a very good bed indeed. Oh, we will do very well. You know what they say: when you cannot get a deer of ten,* be satisfied with a deer of eight."

He was a shiftY lad; and when the two companions that night, having had their supper of eachans, with a good drink of clear spring water, went and lay down on a comfortable bed of bracken made up within the cave, they could not be considered to be very badly off.

But what chiefly exercised Colin McCalmont's mind (though he said nothing about it to Archie) was as to the way in which his father would receive the news of the loss of his boat. Would he take into consideration his son's good intentions? Or would he jump to the conclusion that he had lost this valuable piece of property simply through an inexcusable outburst of boyish folly? It was a serious question; for old McCalmont was a strict disciplinarian.

In the meantime Colin had but little doubt about himself and his companion being able to get back to the mainland—when once they had had a great bonfire lit on the highest point of Farriskeir.

The gray dawn broke.

* Of ten points—referring to the antlers.

“Colin,” said the younger lad, who had not slept much, “did you hear the strange sounds in the night?”

“No, I heard no sounds at all,” said his companion, drowsily.

“There were cries and strange noises; I do not wish to have another night on the island.”

“It is your head that is full of nonsense; and you were hearing the sea-pyots and curlews. Now I am going to sleep again.”

“I cannot sleep any more,” the younger lad said. “Now that there is daylight I am going to the spring for a drink of fresh water.”

Colin McCalmont turned himself over on his bed of bracken; and the younger lad wandered out into the silence and solitude of the early morning.

Very soon McCalmont was asleep again. He was not an over-imaginative person; he did not bother his head about dreams and portents; and, besides, they had been up very early on the previous morning. The bed of bracken was soft enough, and there was no sound to break the silence save the drowsy murmur of the sea outside. He was fast asleep.

But suddenly he found himself wakened again; and he became dimly aware that Archie Livingston had a tight grip of his arm and was kneeling beside him. He roused himself. He found that his companion was all trembling, and that he could scarcely speak.

“What is it, Archie,” he said.

“I—I have seen one of them,” the younger boy gasped, and still he clung to his companion’s arm as if for safety. “Oh, Colin, it is a terrible sight! Quite plain—down by the rocks—it did not move.”

Colin sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“What is this now?” said he, with a trifle of impatience.

“It is no foolishness this time,” the younger lad said, almost entreatingly. “You will see for yourself, Colin, if you have the courage to go. It is like a woman. It is one of the princesses. But she did not see me; or she would have changed into a swan and flown away. But it was a terrible, terrible sight; I will never forget it till the day I die.”

“I tell you, Archie,” said the other, angrily, “that if you let such nonsense come into your head, it is mad you will be in time. Come and let me see your princess and your wild swans now! And if it is a wild swan, perhaps I will tickle him before he flies away.”

He got up and sought out the horse-pistol, which he had put in a dry place.

"Come away, now, and let me see your wild swan that is like a princess."

"Oh no, I cannot! I cannot, Colin!" said the younger lad, who was still trembling.

"But I say you must, now, I will put the nonsense out of your head. Do you wish to become mad, and go through the villages like Alister, the piper's son, that the children make a fool of?"

And then he took to the ironical method.

"Do you know this now, Archie, that I never heard of the ghost yet that would stand to have a charge of buckshot put into it. It will be very fine now to have a shot at a ghost. Come away, Archie; and if we meet any ghost or princess, or anybody of that kind, it is I who will go forward and speak to them and say, 'Good-morning.' For that is good manners to a stranger; and my father has the farming of Farriskeir: and if a stranger comes to Farriskeir, it is not I that would be so unfriendly as not to say 'Good-morning.'"

It was with great reluctance that Archie Livingston consented to go out from the cave again with his companion; and, when at last he undertook to show McCalmont where he had seen this strange thing, he advanced with stealthy step and abated breath.

Of course, McCalmont did not expect to see anything. It was to cure the imagination of the boy that he had insisted on going to the spot. And therefore he went on unheeding, chiefly watching the wild birds flying about.

At a certain eminence on one of the little plateaus, Archie Livingston gripped his arm, and he stopped to ask what this meant; but at the same moment he caught sight of something down by the shore there that, despite all his determination, made his face turn perfectly white. He could not budge. He stood still; but he found himself incapable of speaking.

There, sure enough, down near the water's edge, and seated on a rock, was a figure.

It could not be an optical illusion; for they were both regarding the same spot. And it was the figure of a woman, too—bent forward, her face resting on her hands and covered. And this woman was not dressed as any person in the Highlands dressed.

He stood and stared; trying to get the better of this

thumping of his heart, and summoning to his aid all his disbelief in ghosts.

Then the woman down there lifted her head—wearily, as it seemed to him; then she caught sight of the lads, and sprang to her feet with a slight cry, and advanced to them—her hands stretched out before her, and she was saying something. Now, when she made this sudden and quick advance, Colin McCalmont, despite himself, retreated a couple of steps: but he kept his face towards her; and then he stood.

CHAPTER V

“Archie,” said Colin, in a low voice, “it is a woman. It is not any ghost. I cannot make out what she says except ‘*peety, peety!*’”

The young woman came nearer to them—now timidly and slowly—her hands still outstretched, and tears running down her face, while she spoke rapidly and imploringly.

This appeal, which was a mute appeal so far as he was concerned, drove any remnant of fear out of his mind; he forgot even his timid companion behind; he went forward to her, wondering how he could convey to this poor young lady that they wished to be very friendly to her.

He shook his head, to let her know he did not understand her; and then she, with a great deal more of gladness in her face, for she could not but see that the lads wished to be friendly, began to try to explain her situation by signs. And again and again she pointed to the north, though there was no boat visible.

“Colin,” said the younger lad, “she has been going to Iceland in one of the smacks; and the smack has got wrecked, and she has been saved.”

“How could that be? Her clothes have not been in the water.”

“Colin, say *France* to her, and you will see if she is French.”

Colin, repeated this word to her, which, to tell the truth, was all of the French language that either he or his companion knew; and instantly the young lady nodded eagerly, and said something which, of course, they did not understand.

And now that they had begun to communicate with each other by signs, it soon became clear that the younger lad

was much sharper at that than his companion. In fact, Archie Livingston became the interpreter.

"When she means 'yes,' said he, to his companion, "sometimes she says *see* and sometimes *wee* ; but a nod of the head is still surer. And she says she will go with us to the mainland ; but how am I to tell her that we have no boat, and that she must wait till the evening before we can light the bonfire ?"

"Well, you must get on as well as you can, Archie," said the other ; "and there is the whole day for you to talk to her with your head and your hands ; and in the meanwhile I am going away to dig for eachans, for who knows when the lady may have had anything to eat ?"

"Do you think she will eat eachans ?" said Archie, doubtfully.

"It is better to eat eachans than to starve," said the other. "You do not need the old man of Ross to tell you that. And if she is from France, people who eat frogs need not turn up their noses at eachans."

In not much more than a quarter of an hour Colin McCalmont returned, carrying in both hands a sort of basket made of the fronds of the bracken, and in this green nest lay a quantity of eachans, like so many eggs, all washed white and clean. He put them down in front of her, and took out his pocket-knife and opened a few, as one might open oysters ; and these he offered to her. What she did was singular. She took his hand and pressed it, and then smiled and shook her head.

"Perhaps she is not hungry," Colin said, after a second.

"Perhaps she does not like shell-fish raw," said the other. "Could you not roast some, Colin, as the mussels are roasted ? Could we make a small fire now, and roast some eachans in the ashes ?"

"I see no difficulty about that whatever."

Nor was there. He collected some tufts of withered heather, and broke up one or two pieces of wood, and put underneath the pile a piece of a copy of the *Oban Times* that he had brought with him for wadding ; and at the edge of the paper placed a small *pioye*. The flint from the horse-pistol and the back of his knife did the rest, and soon they had a small fire burning—the precursor of the greater bonfire of the evening.

When the eachans were roasted, Colin picked out some of them from the ashes with a bit of stick ; and Archie, when they were sufficiently cool to be touched, cut them open and offered them to the lady. Tears came into her eyes as he did

so. He thought it very strange that any one should cry for no apparent reason ; but he was glad to see that she took one or two of the roasted shell-fish.

" I am thinking," said the elder of the lads, " that she is only taking them to please us. If she was hungry, she would be quicker. I wonder now if it is not a drink of water she would rather have than anything else ? These French people are very unfortunate that they speak such a language,"

But Archie Livingston, taking the hint, went away along the shore, kicking the sea-weed about until he found a large scallop-shell, which he washed free of sand in the nearest pool. Then he went away over the grassy hillocks till he came to the spring, where he filled the shell. To carry anything like the full quantity back was clearly impossible ; but at least there was enough to let her understand that there was fresh water on the island.

And how grateful the young lady seemed ? She patted the boy on the head—on the shoulder—on the hand. And she spoke to him, though she knew he could not comprehend what she said.

" But you hear that, Colin ?" he said, turning to his companion. " She said a great deal about ' mercy.' She said the water was a mercy. Now, that is what they say also in English ; when you have your food put before you—the meat and the drink—and when you do not ask the blessing in Gaelic, then you have to call these things on the table ' mercies.' She must be very well brought up, and not as a heathen at all."

" But this is what I am thinking of, Archie," said the other ; " that the little water you can get in a scallop-shell is not of much use to any one. And if I could understand the lady as well as you can, I would ask her to go with me to the spring, and there she can have as much water as she likes."

When this proposal was conveyed to her, she followed her guide gladly ; and when they reached the spring, she drank of the water freely by means of this shell. And then they went back to the fire, where Colin McCalmont was having his breakfast ; and the young lady made signs to the younger lad that he, too, was to join in that feast of roasted eachans, and that she was quite content.

" Well, this is a strange thing," said the younger one ; " but when we get back to the mainland we will know all about it, for my father knows French as well as Latin and a great many other things."

"But what is the use of knowing French?" said the elder lad, who was a practical youth, and better acquainted with the price of sheep.

"The use of it? The use of it is to make you a learned person, and then the people pay you for teaching others."

"But your father does not teach any one French, Archie."

"Well, then, the use of it is to make you not so ignorant as the other common people. When Sir Evan Roy comes to Glen Estera he will be speaking quite freely with my father; but the other ones they have to think about their English."

"I think Gaelic is as good a language as any; and also that it is more easily spoken than any other."

"But of what use to you is Gaelic if you go away from the Lewis? For my part, I would like to know six or seven languages."

"That would be a fine thing!" said the other, with a laugh of scorn. "To spend all your life in learning the languages of other people; and then, when you had got them, it would be time to die. I think one language is quite enough for any one; and Gaelic is the easiest."

When they had finished their breakfast, they also went and had a drink of fresh water; and then they set to work to carry up to the highest plateau a pile of the wood that plentifully bestrewed the western shores of the island—some of it, indeed, having been hauled up above high-water mark for transportation to the mainland. The steamer had been comparatively a new one, and much of this wreckage consisted of internal fittings—cabin doors and tables, bottle ranges, benches, lockers, and what not—that had been wofully smashed.

"It is very hard to burn all this good wood," said Colin McCalmont; "and much of it mahogany, too; but we must have a big blaze, and then we are saving the lady's life."

"Yes, and our own lives, too," said the younger lad, sitting down for a rest, for it was stiff work carrying these planks. "They will not be mourning over the wood when they find us alive. And by this time now, Colin, by this time, do you not think some one of the girls must have been sent down from the sheilling for bread?"

"By this time, surely."

"Then they will know we were not at the sheilling last night, and they will be looking everywhere for us; and they will be sure to go and look if the boat is in the creek. And when they see that the boat is not in the creek, they will know how we went away; and you may be sure there will be

many a sharp eye on the lookout all the day and all the evening."

"Very well, now, Archie, I will tell you what you will do. You will leave the rest of the building of the bonfire to me, for I am not easily tired; and you will go back and talk to the lady with your hands and your head as you were doing. Perhaps I will not use any more of the wood; that is the thing that is grieving me. I will build up three or four feet of the withered heather, and then I will put the wood on that. If it was only the autumn now, and we could get the withered bracken, there would be no need to use all that fine wood."

"Have you a lead-pencil, Colin?"

"I have a small bit."

Archie was at that moment rummaging among the splinters and boards they had brought up; and at last he lit upon a piece of wood, painted white, that had been part of the door of a locker.

"Give me your pencil, Colin, and I will go and tell the lady what we are waiting for."

"And if you cannot speak French, are you going to be writing French?" said the other, with a laugh.

"I am not going to write at all, Colin, except in the way that the ancient people wrote, on the Pyramids and such places as that. And you will see whether the lady will understand or whether she will not understand."

"Very well, then, Archie; go back to the lady, and I will go on with the bonfire; and this is what I am thinking, that I will build a bonfire that will be easily made out from the land. For you know what they say: '*There cannot be anything in the sky or on the earth, but the Islay men's eyes can behold; nor can anything in a corner or lock-fast place escape the eye of a Mullman.*' But what I say is, that the Lewis men have sharper eyes than either."

"I think every one knows that," said Archie, "from Fraserburgh all the way round to Greenock."

Well, when McCalmont had finished piling up this great heap of heather and driftwood he went and rejoined his companion; and found, to his great astonishment, that the young lady—whose black eyes seemed to be full of gladness and kindness and gratitude—appeared to understand the whole situation of affairs. For young Livingston had drawn various things, in a rude sort of way, on the bit of white wood; and she seemed a clever, imaginative sort of person, for she guessed eagerly what he meant to convey.

"I never saw a boat like that, Archie," said the elder lad, laughing, "for you have got the mast in the middle of her."

"That is no matter at all," said the other, without confusion, "if the lady understands that the boat will come for her after the bonfire is lit."

"Then you might be doing a worse thing than asking her to come and look at the bonfire, now that it is complete. I can tell you, Archie, that my arms will be sore to-morrow."

The boy showed her the rough sketch of a bonfire that he had made on the board, and then pointed to the middle of the island, himself setting out, and inviting her to accompany him. She understood at once, and smilingly assented. They led her by the driest ways (for there was some mossy ground on these plateaus) to the spot, and she seemed greatly pleased.

"She can speak a little, Archie," said the elder one. "It is not much; but it is a little. She cannot say 'bonfire,' but she says 'bon, bon'—which is a part of it. Though she speaks through her nose, she understands well enough. The French are not so stupid as people say."

They passed the afternoon somehow. More eachans were roasted. As the evening fell, the southerly wind freshened, and the skies got darkened over.

"I hope there is not going to be a gale," said the younger lad, apprehensively.

"That is not any gale," said the other. "And if there was a gale now? We should be two or three days more on the island, perhaps; and what is that? Maybe I would have to shoot a sheep; for the finely brought-up people they cannot live on a handful of eachans and a bit of dulse as you or I could, Archie."

"But that is not any gale; and the darker it grows the sooner we will light our bonfire; and the fresher the wind the sooner will the people come across in your father's boat. So there is nothing to have a downcast face about; and you must not show a downcast face; for the lady there she watches us both, and every one knows that women are easily frightened persons."

They waited until the dusky twilight had gathered over land and sea before they lit the bonfire. At first there was only a little crackling; then a few thin red tongues of fire; then a growing blaze of crimson and orange that made the surrounding twilight look a strange, intense, livid blue. And

then the fire began to roar, for the breeze fanned it; and soon there was a blazing mass of flame that surely would carry a message to the distant shores of Lewis.

"Archie," said the elder lad, "you will keep stirring the bonfire now, and I will go for another armful or two of wood. We must have a big blaze in case there might be a shower of rain. Yes; and if there are any French smacks going by in the night, do you not think now that such a blaze as that will tell them that there is some one on Farriskeir?"

He went and came back with the first load of the drift-wood.

"The sheep are wild with fright, Archie; they never saw anything like this on Farriskeir before."

He fetched another load.

"There, now," said he, "that will make a blaze that will be seen from Gallon Head to Scarfa Island. And if they are already in your father's boat, it is not I that would be surprised; and with a good breeze of wind like this they will not be long in coming over."

"Colin," said the younger lad, "this is what I am thinking of; when your father, or my father, or perhaps Dugald McLean from Glen Estera, comes over in the boat, and they will ask about the lady there, and who she is, and where she came from, what is it now that we will be saying?"

Colin laughed, in his superior wisdom.

"Then you do not remember what the old man of Ross said. This is what he said, Archie: '*That which you do not know, tell that to no one.*' How are we to be answering anything about the French young lady? Let them ask for themselves. And indeed I wish they were here; for it is not a pleasant thing that you and I should be talking and talking, and the lady there not able to know what is going on, because she understands nothing but that useless language. And if your father can speak that language it is not anything to be proud of. He might have made a better use of his time."

The younger lad thought over this for some time. Then he said:

"Well, perhaps the French is not a very useful language while you are in the Lewis or any other part of that country. But if you wished to go to France? If you wished to go to France, Colin, you would have to learn it. There now."

"If I wished to go to France!" said the other, scornfully

“And who would be so foolish as that? There is another wish that I have, that has more of common-sense in it. I would like to go to Fraserburgh, and see the great fleet of fishing-boats. Now there would be some sense in that.”

CHAPTER VI.

THEY formed a picturesque group there on the summit of the level plateau—the smaller lad stirring up the smouldering portions of the bonfire, the elder heaping on broken planks and sticks, the young girl standing apart and sometimes watching them and sometimes scanning the now darkened plain of the waters whence she understood that help was to come; while, as the masses of roaring fire waxed or waned, the long black shadows moved on the greensward and the rocks.

Perhaps, indeed, it was their tending of the bonfire that prevented the lads from keeping a sharp lookout; at all events it was neither of them that first discovered that people were coming to their rescue. They had had the bonfire blazing for nearly an hour, when suddenly the young lady came to them, and eagerly said something, and pointed towards the sea in the direction of the mainland.

Both of the lads withdrew from the glare of the bonfire, and peering into the darkness with eyes that were well accustomed to descry distant objects.

“Well, now,” said Colin McCalmont, with some mortification, “it will be a strange thing, if a French lady can make out what I cannot make out; but there is not anything that I can make out between here and the land.”

“Your eyes are blind with the fire, Colin, and so are mine,” said his companion. “I wish I could ask her what it is.”

“I see it! I see it! it is a light!” exclaimed McCalmont, with involuntary eagerness. Then he immediately checked himself. Throughout he had spoken as if their rescue was a matter of course, in order to keep up his companion’s spirits. He was not going to betray any extraordinary surprise, or delight, or thankfulness now. So he continued in a tone of cool criticism:

“Well, now, Archie, that is a strange sort of light. Your father has a lantern for the dark nights; but that is not a lan-

tern at the mast-head at all. It is very low down, and it is red."

"Maybe it is a torch at the bow," suggested Archie Livingston.

"And you will be making a very good guess that time, Archie, for now I can see the sparks; and the sparks are dropping like sparks from a squib. Oh, this is a fine breeze, to be sure; and your father's boat is as quick a sailor as any one on the west coast of the Lewis. I should not wonder if they could hear us now."

Herewith he gave a tremendous long, slow howl, such as the shepherds use when the dogs are far up on the hill. But there was no response.

"They will be too far away yet," said his companion. "Indeed, Colin, it is not I that am sorry we have not to stay another night on the island. It was terrible—the cries—"

"They were the cries of the French lady, that was all," said the elder lad. "To think they were the cries of ghosts! Tell me this, Archie; if you can see through a ghost, and if a ghost can go away into nothing, where is the throat for it to make a cry with? It is your head that is full of nonsense about ghosts and things like that.

"This is what I will do for you now, Archie; you will catch one of your ghosts and bring him to me; and I will take the knife I have for opening mussels for bait, and I will cut open the ghost for you, and then you will be seeing whether he has any lungs, or a throat, or a tongue that could make a noise. I tell you I have not as much fear of a ghost as I have of a skate. When you are cutting open a skate, sometimes he will snap at your finger. I will let the ghost snap at my finger if he can."

Whether this logic quite convinced Archie Livingston is not of much moment; he merely said, "It is I who am glad not to have another night on Farriskeir," and kept his eyes fixed on the sputtering red light that was now momentarily coming nearer.

What a wild torrent of Gaelic was poured forth when the farmer and schoolmaster got ashore—Colin and Archie helping to haul the bow of the boat up on the shingle! Indeed, amid all these questions and exclamations and remonstrances the worthy schoolmaster quite forgot that ordinarily he made it a strict rule to speak only in English. How could English—which is a slow, formal, limited language—have got from

the boys a narration of all their adventures during the past two days? But, that over, Mr. Livingston recollected himself.

"Archie," said he, in his best English, "you wass saying the leddy was a French leddy?"

"*Seadh!*" said Archie: and then he, too, recollected himself. "Ay, she's French. And no word of English at ahl!"

"Kott pless me!" said the schoolmaster, looking somewhat distressed. And then he turned to his friend McCalmont, Colin's father.

"It is a terriples pusiness," said he, "to speak in another langwiche when one is not speaking it for many years and years. Heh, Duncan, gif me the oat-cake and the whiskey out of the locker; and be quick about it, too. The boys are goot boys, and do not touch the whiskey; but if the young leddy has had nothing to eat ahl the day but eachans, she will hef a drop of whiskey and no harm whateffer. And whiskey is a goot langwiche that every one can understand."

The young French lady had come down from the plateau, and was standing apart—observing everything eagerly, but not attempting to speak. She could see by their gestures, and by their occasionally looking towards her, that they were telling the story, so far as they knew it. But presently Mr. Livingston, having got some whiskey in a tumbler, and carrying a piece of oat-cake in his other hand, went along to where she was standing, and made her a most gracious and courteous bow.

Then he considered. He looked at her dark eyes vaguely (everything was lit up by the glare from the bonfire), as if he were wondering how to open communication with her. Then he said, slowly:

"Mademoiselle—*ici est—est* oak-cake—*et aussi* whiskey—*très bon pour vous*"—

But at the same instant he was evidently startled by her uttering a slight cry—partly of delight, partly of entreaty; and the next moment she was pouring out the story of her wrongs and griefs with many piteous gestures and appeals.

The schoolmaster was quite bewildered. She spoke so rapidly, so pathetically, that he did not understand a single word; he could only vaguely gather from her piteous intonation, that she had suffered injury, and was begging him to be kind to her.

"Kott bless me ! Kott bless me !" he murmured to himself ; " it is a terriple thing to understand a stranche langwiche. The poor creature ! She will pay no heed to the oat-cake and the whiskey."

Then, to add to his confusion, the farmer came up.

" Well, now, Mr. Livingston, and what iss the matter about the young leddy ? It is the stranchest thing I ever heard of. How wass she come to Farriskeir ? "

" You will see this, Dunvorgan, " * said the schoolmaster, " the French langwiche is not like other langwiches ; when it iss spoke slow, then effery one will understand it that knows it ; but when it iss spoke quick, then none understands it at ahl. We will get the young leddy into the poat, and will tek her back home with us ; and maype on the way I will hev the story to tell you."

When the young lady understood that she was to go into the boat, she obeyed willingly ; and when she had taken her seat in the stern, there was handed to her a rug made of the very finest sheep's wool, that Archie Livingston's mother had sent, thinking that the boys might be shipwrecked and be found on the rocks with wet clothes. But indeed the night was not cold, and she merely let the rug lie across her knees. She seemed to care about nothing but having her story understood by the only one among these friendly people who knew a little of French.

And when at length they had got the boat afloat again, and the mainsail hoisted, and when, in the silence of the night they proceeded to make their way back to the mainland of Lewis, the schoolmaster managed to hint to her that, if she would speak slowly, and say what she had said all over again, he would understand her better.

This intimation she seemed to comprehend very well ; for now she began very patiently to speak to him ; and she instantly paused when he seemed not to follow her, so that he might have time to repeat the words or to question her.

" Pless me, Dunvorgan, " said he, at length, " but this is the stranche story ; and if the two lads wass not happen to be on the island, it would hev been a murder, as sure as death. Poor thing ! that was to hev been marriet this ferry day. We will hev the sheriff at Styornoway to inquire into this."

" And what does she say, Mr. Livingston ? " asked the farmer.

* The name of the farm. These territorial designations are common in Scotland.

"Well, you see, Dunvorgan, it is not easy in the dark, where there iss no light to write down a word, to understand such a langwiche as the French langwiche; but if I do not mek a great mistake, the young leddy was stolen away from her friends, and put on board the smack; and little doubt hev I that the master of the smack wass paid to mek away with her—maype in the night-time, if there was no one seeing.

"She is from Morlaix, that iss on the coast of Brittany; and any one that iss well-read, and acquainted with geography and other things, knows that the people of Brittany are very revencheful people. But the young leddy she wass making a prayer to the master of the smack; and maype he wass afraid; or maype he thought that leaving her on an island wass ass goot as anything to put her away—ay! ay! the poor young lass that wass to hef been marriet this ferry day mirover!"

"Mr. Livingston, some one will hev to answer for this; what do you think now?"

"That is what I think. And we will get at the story better when we hef the sheriff from Styornoway; and the sheriffs leddy—oh, she is wonderful goot at ahl langwiches, except the Gælic, and she is not so goot at the Gælic; and the sheriff will be for taking the young leddy over to Styornoway, no doubt, and putting her on board of the *Clansman*, and sending her back to her friends. And the goot heart of her! Do you know what she has been offering to me."

"How can I know?"

"She wass wanting me to tek her gold rings and her gold watch and chain, too; and to gif them to the boys for their kindness. Do you hear that now, Colin, and you, too, Archie? But I would not hef her go away back to France, and be speaking to the French people, and be saying that the Highland people would tek money for a kindness. I would not hef any one say that."

"That iss right, Mr. Livingston; my boy Colin would tek no money for being of help to any one. And if he would tek money, then it iss a stick I would tek to his back, to gif him a little goot manners. But it is a stranche thing that the master of the yacht, if he wass such a scoundrel as that, wass not for stealing the young leddy's watch, and the other things, too."

"Dunvorgan," said the schoolmaster, thoughtfully, "I will tell you my opinion now—that the master of the smack wass

afraid of what he had done, and was glad to get her away out of the smack without thinking of anything else. And I suppose he was thinking that if he left her on Farriskeir, no one would ever see or hear of her again—that she would go mad and drown herself, maybe—ay, ay—and ferry likely that would have happened but for the two young lads—it was a very strange chance.”

When they reached the shore on the other side, it was close on midnight; but all the same there were near a dozen people waiting for them; and great was the wonderment among the folk when they heard the strange news. And they were civil enough not to stare at the young French lady; but they were very kind to her; and she was taken up to Dunvorgan farm, where they got some supper for her, and some tea, and gave her a bedroom all to herself—which is a luxury in those parts. And amid all this the lads found occasion to have a little talk between themselves—of course in Gaelic.

“There is one good thing, Archie, that every one is taken up with the young French lady; and my father has not said anything about the loss of the boat.”

“And I do not think they will say anything now, Colin; for three lives are better than a boat.”

“But it is hard on my father, Archie, that he should have to pay for another boat.”

However, as it turned out, the new boat was paid for in quite an unexpected way. For when the sheriff at Stornoway had learned all this strange story, and when he had communicated with the young lady’s friends in Brittany, there was, of course, a great commotion; and the two lads had to go over to Stornoway to give evidence there before some gentlemen sent all the way over from France for the purpose.

Then the young lady left with these gentlemen (though it seemed as if she would never cease expressing to the two lads, through the sheriff, her gratitude to them), and no one expected to hear any more of the thing, except the sheriff, who knew better.

One day Colin McCalmont and Archie Livingston, with their respective fathers, were summoned to go over to Stornoway, to the sheriff’s office, and they went.

“I have got the reward now, for you two boys,” he said.

“What reward?” they both said, at once.

“The reward that was offered in the French papers for

information about that young lady when she was found to be missing."

He showed them an oblong piece of paper.

"It is five thousand francs; do you know how much that is?"

"I do not," said Colin; and the schoolmaster's son looked doubtful.

"I suppose you can divide by twenty-five, surely?" said he, good-naturedly.

"That would come to two hundred pounds," said the younger lad.

"Very well, then. That piece of paper is worth two hundred pounds; and that is one hundred pounds for each of you. If I were you, I would put it in the savings-bank; and when you grow up, it would be a fine thing for you."

"I will not do that, sir," said Colin McCalmont.

"What then?"—

"I will buy a boat for my father as good as the one that was sunk—ay, and better, too. And if there is anything over, that is what I will put into the savings-bank."

"But wait a minute my lad. This five thousand francs is the reward offered by Mademoiselle Desclin's guardians—for she has neither father nor mother; but she wishes to add something to show that she does not forget your kindness to her. She wishes to be allowed to give you a boat, sails and all complete, similar to the one that was sunk; only it is to be your own. But that will do for your father as well as for yourself."

"Surely, surely," said Dunvorgan. "Let the lad have the whole of the hundred pounds put in the bank in his own name. It will be a good thing for him when he will take a farm for himself."

"And you, Archie Livingston; I am to buy you a silver watch. And if I were you I would sit down and write the young lady a letter in very good English. And there is another thing, Colin, my lad; she wants you to have the boat called the *Félicité*.—for that is her own name: and you can have no objection to that."

"Surely no, sir; and will I write her a letter, too?"

"You could not do better. And so that is all settled. But wait a minute, my lads; I think the next time you go out to frighten the Frenchmen from stealing the sheep at Farriskeir, you'd better leave the pistol ashore; you might get into trouble. And perhaps if the Government were to send the jackal

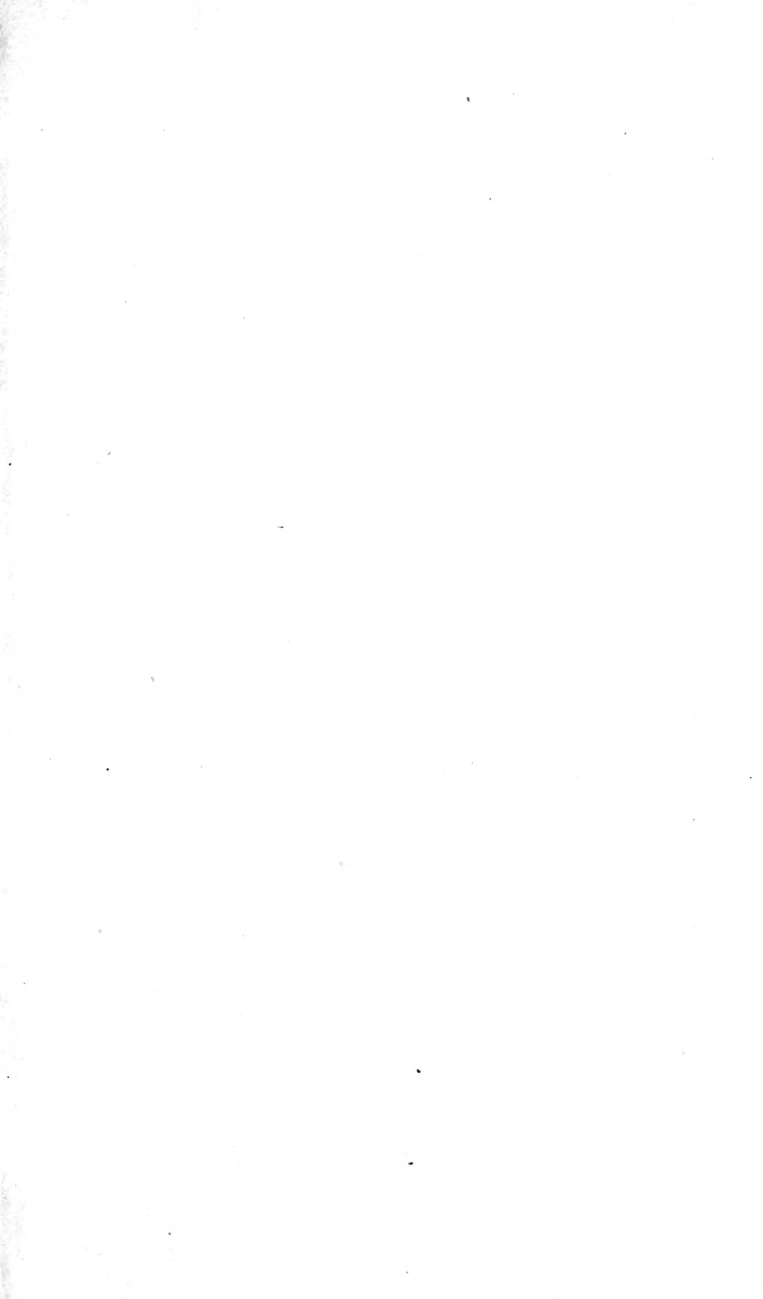
round that way once or twice about this time of the year, that would give them a greater fright than any horse-pistol."

So that was the end of the adventure; and if you should happen on the west coast of Lewis to run against a smart little cutter called the *Felicité*, and should wonder at the name; they will tell you the story there about the two boys who went to frighten the French fishermen away from Farriskeir and Ruaveg.

THE END.

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